Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

EUGENE M. SCHAEFFER

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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[Note: This transcript was not edited by Mr. Schaeffer]

Q: Today is July 23, 1993. This is an interview with Eugene M. Schaeffer which is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies, and I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. Gene, could you start off by giving me a bit about your background-when and where you were born, where you grew up and a bit about your early education?

SCHAEFFER: I was born in Memphis, Tennessee and grew up in the area in west Tennessee and Mississippi as well. I was in the war...

Q: Now, you were born in 1921. How far had your education gone before the war caught up with you?

SCHAEFFER: Before the war I had only done high school and then went to work and had several jobs.

Q: What kind of jobs did you have, because we are talking depression time?

SCHAEFFER: With a court newspaper that reported on court proceedings and registration of wills and activities of the police and fire department, etc. It was largely subscribed to by lawyers in my home city of Memphis. Not a very racy kind of reading. But it had a devoted following in terms of their own professional needs. Later I worked with a building supply company. We were selling all sorts of things like roofing, paints, nails and all these basic things that again are not very exciting, but we had an interesting clientele that consisted heavily, if not predominantly of people from across the river in a state called Arkansas, that is well and widely known now days...

Q: The present President is from Arkansas.

SCHAEFFER: Exactly, Bill Clinton. ...and a scattering of people coming in from that part of Tennessee and Mississippi. Memphis tends to serve that area.

Q: Was Boss Crump?

SCHAEFFER: Boss Crump was very much in control in those years.

Q: Did you feel his hand in building materials?

SCHAEFFER: No, we didn't. Of course, my still being a teenager, I wasn't that much in touch with the political trends that prevailed in those years immediately pre-war. But I enjoyed that experience because looking back on it...maybe I have come to enjoy it more in retrospect than while it was all happening...because I think it isn't a bad thing for people to have a work-a-day kind of experience early on.

Q: Yes, the regular education treadmill doesn't supply that experience and I think people suffer from it.

SCHAEFFER: I found that I have had a certain feeling for people at that sort of level in our economy and our society. One can transfer that experience here and there about the world very usefully, I have found.

Q: Tell me a little bit about your parents, where they were from, etc.

SCHAEFFER: My parents were both from west Tennessee. My father from a small rural community not far from Memphis. He died quite early, he was only 36 years old. My mother was from nearby, a town called Jackson about 70-80 miles from Memphis and came to Memphis about 1918 and went to work as a stenographer. In the course of that experience she met my father and they married at a very early age. I am an only child. My father passed away when I was 12 or 13. My mother subsequently remarried a very fine person. He was a manager in an insurance business. We lived for the most part in Tennessee, including locations in east Tennessee. So I had in a very modest way a chance to discover what proved to be significant differences within that one state. But I think what really pointed me in the direction of the work that I have done for a long time, was the writings of Richard Halliburton, the travel writer, especially, Seven League Boots, The Road to Romance. It stirred me deeply.

Q: Oh, yes, I think for so many of us these were real adventure.

SCHAEFFER: And it has never stopped affecting me. In part because Halliburton was from west Tennessee. His father was a very successful realtor, but not in the conventional sense, I think he dealt mostly in land in that area. Richard went to Princeton and then got the urge to travel and did in fact at an early age...I don't think he quite completed his program at Princeton...began to write so appealingly of the places. He had a romantic flare so he did all these wonderful things like swimming the Helios Pond and crossing the Alps on an elephant. Really quite a daring fellow and as you may recall eventually lost his life trying to cross the Pacific in a junk with two or three others. I think they had hoped to arrive in San Francisco about the time of the fair there, shortly before the war.

Q: Now, Halliburton inspired you, but the greatest recruiter of the Foreign Service of our generation was a little problem that began in 1939 in Europe, World War II. When did you get the hot breath of military on your back?

SCHAEFFER: I went right into the Service in 1941 and joined the Coast Guard. I had some domestic assignments in the US (United States) for the first couple of years and then went to the Pacific with a construction detachment. Our assignment was to build long-range navigation stations in the Pacific Islands. There were two or three detachments out there doing that. We built them for the 20th Air Force and we were in various places but for the most part my unit was in Guam.

Q: Were you getting any feel about the Foreign Service at this point?

SCHAEFFER: I think that urge came early with me, even pre-war. And, if anything, the war just fueled my desire to work in that field. When I came home, having been discharged from the service, Life magazine did a piece on a young vice consul. Well, that, as the British might say, really tore it. I went to college then in my home town, Rhodes College. It is Presbyterian in origin. It still retains an affiliation with the Presbyterian church. Small, but quite a good college, and in recent years has made enormous progress. It is everlasting a liberal arts college. I am tempted to say that was the whole focus of the teaching there. We had some very good people who had been at Edinburgh and Oxford and elsewhere. I took a degree in political science and took what there was available at the time in international studies. There wasn't any real focus on it, it was pretty incidental to the political science curriculum. Since, interestingly and most gratifyingly, they have gone into international studies with a vengeance. I remember after having been posted to my first assignment in Burma, of giving them some money to buy some books on Burma, and later I gave them some money to purchase some books on India where I spent some time. I had the feeling that while they were grateful, and said so, that these books ended up being in quiet repose on some back shelves of the library. Now, that may not be all together fair, but perhaps there simply wasn't that demand for them at the time. Now, as I say, they are focused very strongly on international studies and are quite proud of that fact, and, of course, I am.

Q: Well, you graduated from Rhodes College when?

SCHAEFFER: In 1949.

Q: Then what did you do?

SCHAEFFER: I went to Columbia and did public law and government, mostly with the focus again on international studies. After that I came into the Department in the Executive Secretariat on a staff called the Committee Secretariat.

Q: This was when?

SCHAEFFER: I came into the Department July 1, 1952.

Q: Exactly what were you doing?

SCHAEFFER: It was a wonderful first assignment. We serviced departmental committees as Secretariat Officers, interagency committees and occasionally international meetings. So one had an opportunity right off to sit in as a very, very minor observer in the councils of the high and mighty. It was a nice beginning.

Q: Who were some of the people you were observing as sort of a fly at the table?

SCHAEFFER: I am trying to think of the general who was one of the senior officers under Eisenhower during the war who was in State...

Q: Bedell Smith?

SCHAEFFER: Yes, Bedell Smith. I remember participating as a Secretariat Officer in an international committee consisting of several countries on the repatriation of the assets taken from various West European countries during the Nazi occupation of those countries. Bedell Smith was the senior member of the US delegation.

Q: He was Under Secretary of State, I think.

SCHAEFFER: I have to say, as a beginner and wet behind the ears...it would exaggerate to say that I was quaking in my boots...

Q: He was a pretty tough character. From all accounts he didn't take young people, or anybody, lightly.

SCHAEFFER: He was very much the sort of individual that one always when speaking to used "Sir" often. But I enjoyed it. I think, sometimes to be quite honest about ourselves, we say things like that...I certainly have enjoyed the memory of it, enjoyed it in retrospect, but whether I enjoyed every minute of it as it was happening is a moot question.

Q: I understand. What would be an average job that you would be doing when you had these things?

SCHAEFFER: Well, we would meet with interagency committees on a whole range of matters and we were expected to keep the paper flow going. The Secretariat in those days had its own reproduction unit, as one would expect, to see that all the documents were available. To do minutes of the discussions expeditiously and get them distributed to the participants. And then, of course, we had our own small organization that we reported to beyond the business of recording minutes of the meetings we shared with the Chief of the Committee Secretariat any impressions or brought to his attention any thoughts on how we could accomplish what we were trying to do more effectively. How we might communicate the results, not necessarily more widely, but direct the results of those meetings to the people who would find them most useful. There were certain obvious recipients and then there were some that as we discussed matters we decided should by all means be included. So we were kind of a cog in the wheel, so to speak, in communications terms on the work of the committees, the progress and assuring that those who needed to be kept inform were informed. We were not, obviously, participants in discussions, themselves.

Q: Did you get any feel for where the State Department stood in relation to the other departments on these things? Now the State Department's role gets overwhelmed by Treasury or Defense or something like that. Was State at that time calling the shots pretty much?

SCHAEFFER: I had a sense that there was already at that early juncture in terms of post-war experience, although perhaps it wasn't quite that early, my part having only begun in 1952, that there was already some sense on the part of other agencies, including some well-placed newly created agencies, like the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) and the AID (Agency for International Development), which went through repeated metamorphoses and was called variously by whatever collection of initials applied at the time. Those were the two that I was the most conscious of at the time. Economic aid and intelligence programs, of course, were very much up front in that period. Maybe what I really mean is that as far as our responsibilities were concerned they were up front. I thought there was a certain competitiveness. Now I look back on it from the perspective of many years, maybe this was a period of sorting out just how these responsibilities were going to be shared, pre-war having had only a Department of State, and not an AID agency and not a CIA. One imagines, and maybe I am revealing an ignorance of the pre-war situation, that State had a certain voice in whatever economic assistance was being rendered and provided in those years, and certainly some was, although nothing remotely on the scale of post-war years.

Q: Latin America was probably the major...

SCHAEFFER: That would be the prime example, although there was some relief in Europe going back as far as the First World War, etc. So I look back and begin somewhat belatedly to realize that was an even more interesting period to be even a small part of it all, then I recognized it at the time.

Q: You continued doing this for how long?

SCHAEFFER: That didn't last long because of the change of administrations. With the advent of the Eisenhower administration...

Q: This would have been 1953.

SCHAEFFER: Right. ...a number of changes were made in State. Among the many was the reduction of the staff of the Committee Secretariat and a kind of revamping of the Executive Secretariat, because it was a critical position there in the State hierarchy even though a staff activity, although a fairly high level one. So they reduced the Committee Secretariat from a dozen people to four. The junior most people were scattered out through the Department. I ended up in the Educational Exchange Service, which in those days was called IES(International Education Services). I worked at that for a time. Perhaps this isn't untypical of many who sat on the edge of momentous activities, that when you go out from there, perhaps especially if you are young and susceptible to these waves of feeling and emotions, I felt that somehow this was not remotely the kind of experience that I had had initially in the Secretariat. So I went with the National Educational Association and spent three years with them.

Q: That was a private organization?

SCHAEFFER: Yes, a very large teacher association. I understand currently they are now in discussion with the other group, the American Federation of Teachers. It has been a kind of union while NEA (National Education Association) in the past saw itself as a professional, and indeed was a professional association, but has become more union in its outlook and in its activities. I think the pressure from the American Federation of Teachers, which was actually affiliated with the AFL and continued to be after it became AFL-CIO (American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations)... I think in order to retain its place in the scheme of things, that the NEA found itself more or less obliged to shift ground a bit and become something of a union, itself. But at the time that I made the move, they had a very substantial program of educational travel abroad for teachers. I went into that as the deputy director and did, in fact, go to Europe and the Middle East a few times, participating in their biannual conferences of the World Confederation on Organizations of the Teaching Professions. It is known best as the WCOTP.

Q: What brought you back into USIA (United States Information Agency)?

SCHAEFFER: A lingering desire, as yet unfulfilled, to work in the Foreign Service. A friend, with whom I had frequent professional contact while at the NEA, told me that there were opportunities in USIA during that period, 1957, that I might want to look into. As friends will do we talked about our work and our lives generally, and he knew of my continuing interest in this sort of thing. So I went to USIA and they took me in and I started in 1957 with them.

Q: How did they absorb you into USIA? Did you get any training?

SCHAEFFER: We had a program that I think ran something on the order of six to eight weeks of lectures, visitations from around the foreign affairs community, and then we were given our assignments. My assignment apparently was going to be Japan. So I went out and bought a suit or two that would be right for the colder weather that one can have in Tokyo. I discovered many years later that their winters are not that hard to take. No sooner had I done that then the powers to be said, "Sorry, old boy, it is not going to be Japan at all, it is going to be Burma." Well, my mind was absolutely blank at that time. I had no notion of Burma. I went there to Rangoon.

Q: Were you married at the time?

SCHAEFFER: Married and had one child and one en route.

Q: You got to Rangoon in 1957. What was the situation there, politically and economically, at that time?

SCHAEFFER: Still very much trying to find its way as a new nation.

Q: It was independent?

SCHAEFFER: It was independent in January, 1948. So in the life of a new country, seven or eight years is no time at all. U Nu was prime minister and he was strongly positioned in that job. But they were the rankest novices in the whole business of self government, not surprisingly. The British had been there starting as long ago as 1825, or thereabouts. The British took the country in three successive wars in the 19th century. In the 1820's the sort of delta and river area that touches down on Thailand and thereabouts. And again in the 1850's and finally in the 1880's they took the last and final bite and swallowed that country entirely and remained there until the Second World War.

It was said to be one of the most fought over countries during that war. If you recall, the Japanese came in from the south and pushed the British out in heavy fighting out through the north. Ultimately, General William Slim and the 14th Army returned with some American assistance and pushed the Japanese back over the same route in reverse from north to south. So it was heavily damaged. But it wasn't a country that had a lot of infrastructure to be damaged, there were some railroads. The city of Rangoon sustained certain damage, but remarkably not as much as one would expect considering the amount of military activity there was there.

The Burmese saw this rightly as their opportunity to press for independence and did so successfully over a two or three year period, declaring independence officially in January, 1948. The British were pretty well exhausted from the whole business in their colonial empire. Even the ordinary student of the period, would understand, I think, some of the reasons why. They had extended themselves enormously in quite a different time and managed to keep things going essentially their way for, in some cases, a remarkably long period, notably India. But the pressures were there, the world was changing. The war, of course, just gave an immense push to that whole process of change.

Q: Why don't we stop here and pickup with the political system in Rangoon the next time around.

SCHAEFFER: All right.

Q: Today is August 11, 1994. Gene, we have you in Burma where you were from 1957-62. What job were you doing there?

SCHAEFFER: Initially, I was at the embassy in Rangoon as an assistant cultural officer. There were two of us in those positions, and of course there was the cultural attachï¿½, who was a Howard University professor, Wright. I think he was perhaps a professor of religion. He was quite interested in Buddhism, Theravada Buddhism, the Buddhism that one finds practiced by the Burmese, and managed to establish what appeared to be a meaningful connections with the Buddhist hierarchy. And they did matter. The whole notion of the face...that Buddhism permeated that society as much as any I have ever had any experience of. And that included the government as well. So, U Nu, I think perhaps made it a point to let himself be seen in many situation as a debutee of that faith and in that context, I think it was a very astute political thing to do. I shouldn't say astute really because I think the man was sincere in his feelings, attitudes and practices.

I handled educational exchanges, sharing in a sense the liaison with the U.S. Educational Foundation there with the cultural attachï¿½. I handled visiting lecturers, speakers on a variety of subjects, the American Participant Program which over the years was called various names. I was fairly actively involved in the library. We had a very substantial library not only in the center of town, but also out by the university. In those days we had one of Buckminster Fuller's geometric domes, so we setup shop across from the university. We had a posting to Mandalay and I had some involvement with them in my subject areas of specialties-exchanges, libraries, and that sort of thing, things cultural and educational. So I got up there now and again.

Q: It sounds like at this time Burma was not turning inwards, as it has for so long now. Did you have the feeling that they were reaching out?

SCHAEFFER: That's right, they weren't. Now in retrospect, at least from our viewpoint, the diplomatic establishment there, those were halcyon years. Of course, they had the tradition in the country of the American Baptist Mission (ABM), which was a very strong presence in education and religion. They had established some good schools in the country and were very active, not just in Rangoon, but out in the hinterland. They had been since the 19th century when a remarkable man from Connecticut, Adoniram Judson, went out as a missionary to Burma. He did a book on that remarkable experience, called The Golden Shore. By the time the Second World War was over, the ABM had been present in the country for at least 120 years or so. They were quite well established. We, obviously, had no direct interaction with them, that would have been counterproductive.

Q: What were our interests in Burma at that time?

SCHAEFFER: Well, Burma was a very open scene and the East Europeans were there, the Communist Chinese were well represented there, and I think the U.S. felt that this was an opportunity to establish relations so to be in at the creation of a vital part of Asia. We had a fairly active AID (Agency for International Development) program there which was assisting them in basic fields, agriculture, education, medicine, etc. So it was really a very good time to have been there because the feelings were good there...the Burmese were trying, it seemed to me scrupulously, not to lean noticeably in either direction politically, as between us and the communist countries represented there. I think they managed to do that tolerably well. But, as it turned out in time to come, not at all to the liking of many in the military who felt that this was a rather laid-back and passive administration, if we can call it that, that left a lot to be desired. They had just won independence and they wanted to have a Burma for the Burmese who wanted, I guess, to extrapolate from bits and pieces of my experience back then, Burma to come forward out of a very long colonial past as a country that was well able to seek its own destiny. There was that underlying what seemed to us a very open and productive kind of environment for establishing American relations in that country. The military, not too long after, took control of the country and continued to be the power that determined...

Q: When you were there, how did you find the Burmese students? Were they interested in what we were doing, in America, at all?

SCHAEFFER: Yes. We did benefit certainly, not just from the American Baptist Mission that I have mentioned, but from the Catholic Missions there, in teaching English. Of course, English was fairly strongly rooted, but only in the major towns-Rangoon, of course, and to a somewhat lesser degree the major provincial towns. So we had that very wonderful asset, as it were, of the language and the earlier familiarity of English law. Some of the leading people in government and education had been trained in England. As a result of mainly American missionaries, there was also a certain familiarity with the U.S. So we had that going for us in our efforts to move among the Burmese and communicate with them.

Q: How about the media? Did you have much to do with the media?

SCHAEFFER: No, I had really nothing of consequence to do with the media. The public affairs officer and the information officer...we had a sizeable staff when one sees it from the perspective of time, considering the size of the country and perhaps even considering the significance of the country. We had, as I recall it, two or three information officers and the public affairs officer was very actively involved. We had for a time there, Arthur Hummel, who had been in China and had a very strong background in that part of the world. And there were a few others in time whose parents had been missionaries in southeast Asia or East Asia, that had come into the Foreign Service and turned up in Burma during those early years. But, that was both a plus and a minus. It was a plus in the sense of insight and understanding. It could be a minus in the sense of that identification with missionary activities, although the missions, as nearly as I can recall, continued to be active and I think quite strong in those immediate post-war years. Now, I believe the Catholics were the last to go and they have been out of Burma for some years now.

Q: We had two ambassadors while you were there, Walter McConaughy and William Snow. How did they operate?

SCHAEFFER: Well, I thought McConaughy, who had some China experience, was a very positive presence there. He and the public affairs officer, and I am thinking particularly of Arthur Hummel, seemed to work very well together. He was out and around and I think seemed to have a good working relationship with the Foreign Ministry and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and indeed with U Nu and the principals around him as well. So I thought he was a positive presence in the American effort there in those years.

Now, Snow, I have less recollection of. I left there the last time in 1962, and I don't recall his years of service. McConaughy was there most of the time that I was.

Q: Were there any problems while you were there with the Indians?

SCHAEFFER: I wasn't acutely aware of it, but one on the other hand did sense initially and then in time came to know from here and there some bits of evidence that the Burmese felt that the Indians were not an all together benign presence in their midst. I think they really rather resented them. As we have seen, indeed they did. I think that view was maybe held most forcibly and in the event, most effectively, among the officers in the military. There was a kind of hierarchy there in pre-war times with the English at the top as government workers and in a variety of intellectual and quasi-intellectual pursuits, the Indians in trade, the Chinese, and the Burmese tended to generalize low men on that totem pole unmistakably. The Indians, of course, as the result of their more or less favored position in the economy, not in the political scheme of things, although I think there may have been some Indians in the government. The Burmese did, even in my time there, now and again give some evidence of their dissatisfaction with the fact that the Indians controlled as much, had as large a voice, in the government as sort of senior public servants. My impression was not so much in policy making, although there have been a very exceptional few who were at that level as well. They resented that, especially the educated Burmese, and those who perceive where they stood in their own country.

Q: You left in 1962. How did you look upon whither Burma when you left?

SCHAEFFER: Do you want a short answer to that? I was of mixed minds, not to hedge an answer to your question, because as I said I wondered how this was all going to work out even in the near term because when I left in 1962 the Indians and the Chinese were both still strongly placed there. But to make a distinction between the two, the Chinese were, for the most part, business people. The Indians were more across the board as participants in that society as I have tried to say. There was already the beginning, at least, of some anti-Indian feeling, although not noticeably anti-Chinese. I think it had to do with the ethnic kinship that existed between the Burmese and Chinese, and also the fact that the Chinese were a very substantial force on their north and historically that was where their troubles came from until the British started coming in in the first quarter of the 19th century and eventually took all of Burma in stages, in three successive wars that went on roughly between 1825-85. I guess I wasn't that surprised at the direction that things took politically. That feeling came more from being upcountry in Mandalay my last two years in Burma, than it did while I was in Rangoon. The army, as I traveled about...we had considerable freedom of movement which as I look back on was somewhat surprising given the factors, the conditions that prevailed there. I was always mindful and my predecessors had shared this with me, that one would be well advised to keep one's contacts with the senior military and keep in their good graces. In fairness to them, I didn't feel that constrained to do it, but in practice it made good sense.

Q: Well, then you went to another powerhouse in the area where you spent a good deal of your time, New Delhi, where you served from 1962-67. Was that just a normal assignment or did you request it?

SCHAEFFER: Yes, I think I may have indicated India on my April Fool's list.

Q: Yes, that was an assignment preference list one filled out that was due on April 1st. You would ask for three places and everybody would joke about it being an April Fool's list, although you often got what you wanted, if it made sense.

SCHAEFFER: Yes, I think that was true. I am reasonably sure that I mentioned India, and possibly as my first choice. It did have an appeal. There we were again in the early years of working with the Indians in their relatively recently found freedom, they had gotten their independence around 1947 or 1948.

I had a job as cultural officer for the Delhi region. The country, of course, is terribly large and we did have the country post in the capital, in New Delhi, but we had substantial activities and sizeable staffs in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. Beyond that we also had subposts in half a dozen other places. At one time I believe we must have had nine or ten locations in the country. We had something like 65 or so American staff and 600 plus Indians.

Q: What was USIS (United States Information Service) doing in India? What were we after?

SCHAEFFER: I think we were in a sense a part of the developmental thrust of the American mission in India in those days. There were, of course, geopolitical considerations as far as India's very special position in that whole part of the world, and with the concerns that persisted with regards specifically with China, but our answer to that and certainly a substantial part of our effort there in terms of money, people and talent was developmental. That appealed certainly to me. I wasn't out like so many AID people trying to help people grow better wheat in the Punjab, in other words, at the grass root level, but we were working with people in education and tangentially we were working with people in AID in the exchange of persons program, working as the embassy's liaison with U.S. Educational Foundation in India, which at that time, as binational educational foundations went in those years, was very well funded and strongly staffed. So we were bringing people into the universities as speakers in the American Leaders and Specialists Program. We were bringing people at more nearly the working level who were doing all sorts of things, in fact tended to have to do with arts and education. They may be people in theater, in graphic arts, etc. The Indians are, and I think this is well known even among people who don't consider themselves very informed on India, very culturally minded. They have one of the venerable cultures of the world. So, generally they were pretty open to that.

Now and again in the early years, there was some sense that if it was going to be Western education, literature, theater, etc., it had best be British, despite the fact that they were their former masters. Again here were the British and the Americans in an Asian country, working...it wouldn't be right to say "side-by-side"...but the British had a very open and I think a very astute and shrewd attitude towards Indian education. They were very responsive to churches coming in and establishing schools. Beyond that, they, as it turned out, were evidently open to American missionary activities in education and medicine. So we had a cultural base there to work with in those schools and colleges and universities. We brought in a lot of people to lecture there, we had a strong Fulbright Program, we had a number of people over the years who were lecturing in the universities, and all the while we sent their people back to the US. So we had a lively educational exchange going there, but we weren't the only source, although a prime source for Indians in terms of opportunities to study and even in time, as it turned out, many to teach and do research in the United States. It was a very satisfying program.

Q: From the American point of view, next to China there has always been this love affair with India. So I imagine you could get practically anybody you wanted to come, couldn't you?

SCHAEFFER: Yes, we could and that, of course, was clearly a plus enabling us to get some very good people from America academia. I think in some sense our attitude towards India may have had a tinge of ambivalence to it. I think some people felt that the Anglicized "Injuns" could out Herod. They could be more British than the Raj.

Q: I found them insufferable myself, in my dealings with the Indian foreign service in some places. And, of course, Nehru was renown for treating American Presidents and the like with distain.

SCHAEFFER: Yes, with a certain hauteur. Well, I have to say, Stu, that I have always sort of enjoyed the theatrical aspects of politics and of interrelationships between societies too, because I did some acting in college and a bit since then, and I found that made it a little easier to take some of these very types that you are talking about. I became, I suppose, a little intrigued by their style and demeanor, leave aside the content. Of course, it did happen that at times when I switched back to my other self, my Foreign Service officer self, I thought that this guy was really impossible, why am I sitting here quietly while the DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) is talking to him, enjoying his response.

Q: It sounds like again a period when you weren't running across a lot of roadblocks as far as the government, itself, trying to say, "Well, maybe too many students are going to America," or "Too many Americans are coming here to lecture." Did you find any of this at that time?

SCHAEFFER: No, because in the Indian tradition - I shouldn't begin it this way because it would sound like de facto something will follow inevitably and it is more complicated then that - but the Indians like the Chinese and many other Oriental people, put a very high premium on education and learning and one hopes ultimately wisdom. So there was a certain unearned cache that American professors had and people in the arts of any stature at all from the U.S. that were brought there. That side of the Indians, I think, responded to them on the whole very favorably. Now, in every field there are people, certainly in the arts in America, who have some kind of political attitude too and now and again one would become conscious of that even though they welcomed having a person of stature from education or the arts in this country, they may sense some differences of view in matters political. Being a new country and having been under a European power for over 300 years, one had in time to recognize that as being not all together unnatural, the feeling on the part of some of their people. I think they have gained progressively in sophistication. God knows they were invaded with offers. The communist countries were quite active there too.

Q: How did you find the communist cultural offerings were taken?

SCHAEFFER: Well, the Russians brought their dancers there and were very selective in the cities they performed in. Bombay, a very Westernized city culturally, was one of them. So they had their audience. They had libraries and a book program. I think they tried in all the ways they could to capitalize on leftist sentiment born by the long presence of the British there. There were some able and articulate people with leftist notions politically. So there was in a sense a ready made audience there, but I think only in a sense. I think the best of the Indian leadership had tended to be products of some of the best schools in the country, as we see in most societies, our own included, and by in large they came out with a lot of notions based on the British feelings about the place of government in a society, etc. But, yes, I think the communist countries were certainly active and were not without some successes. But I think that we had - we may not have always felt it and I am sure we didn't - looking at the history of India some advantages there. I think with all of their feelings about the British, take them all in all, I think the best among them, had no trouble acknowledging the contributions that the British had made to the intellectual life of India in the modern era. Obviously not much was happening that reached out very far before the advent of the 19th century.

Q: You got there in 1962. The Kennedy administration was still around. Were you there when Jacqueline Kennedy came?

SCHAEFFER: I had just gotten there.

Q: I was wondering how that went and also what was the reaction to the assassination?

SCHAEFFER: First of all, the reception given Jacqueline Kennedy was just tremendous. We were riding high in those weeks that she was there. She went out to Rajasthan, and traveled around to several places in the country outside of New Delhi. As far as John Kennedy's assassination, I think we were almost overwhelmed with expressions of dismay and regret and praise for him. I have still a photograph of the memorial ceremony in the new embassy in New Delhi where Nehru was present with other senior people in the government of the day. The papers, of course, were all full of this tragic event and editorials were very supportive and positive. That affected them deeply and visibly. I would say, without presuming to be able to recapture that moment which is now 30 or more years ago, that it went right across that very large country.

Q: You were there with Ambassador Galbraith and then Chester Bowles, two sort of major public relations type figures. Did you feel their impact or how they operated at all?

SCHAEFFER: I was not always privy to some of the major encounters of the ambassadors with the leadership, but I would say that Galbraith went down very well with the intellectuals, and not surprisingly. Being an economist added, I would venture, enormous interest on the part of the Indians in him, because they were very much at a critical stage in determining the direction that their own economy would take. He reminded me of some British high official of times not long passed so that image probably didn't hurt him contrary to what one might think. You might think some Indians would feel that he was entirely too like some of their former masters, but I don't think that was the way he was seen.

Bowles, I think, they liked enormously. He had been there before. I think he was the very soul of sincerity and I think they felt, at least initially, that he had a very strong sponsorship from the top on down through the senior levels in the American administration at that time. So he had more then paper credentials. He also had a kind of background in matters economic, having been a very successful businessman, himself, and something of an idealist. There certainly is an idealist streak in Indians, maybe epitomized by people like Nehru and some of the great people in their literary history. I think they both had a fairly open road to run in.

Q: How did Vietnam play? You were there when we were just beginning to get really involved.

SCHAEFFER: Not well, as I recall it. Freedom was the name of the game and the emergence of Asian countries to find their own way, politically, economically, all the great attributes of being in fact free. I think that was sort of a minus, very much so. I don't recall as we talk any very pointed incidents or experiences in my own work there.

Q: When was the Indian-Chinese border war?

SCHAEFFER: I think there was one there around 1964 or 1965.

Q: Did that get to you at all?

SCHAEFFER: Not really. There again, I think people who were monitoring the political temperature of Indo-Chinese relations regularly would be able to say more specifically the effect that had. I think it was obviously an unsettling discovery the Indians made of the degree to which the Chinese meant to deal with them on the whole border issue. In a way it was a sad thing because both countries had, if we look at it as if we were sitting on a distant star...I think they got the message on the depth of feeling on the part of the Chinese in respect to the border between two countries. And there were much, much more needful things that both countries ought to have been firmly focused on back in that time, and still even yet.

Q: Did you find your program at all bothered by the usual group of radical students? It doesn't take many to go around and cause disturbances and protest, etc. I would think the Indians would have a surplus of these types.

SCHAEFFER: We had some of that. We did do some things that may have been a counteractive to this type of individual on the university campuses. We brought American university students out. Some came under educational exchange programs. Others, like the Syracuse Maxwell Fellows...we had a number of men who came as a kind of "learn-as-you-work" assignment and were assigned to various parts of the American mission in India. We encouraged those students to go out to the universities with us. In fact I accompanied them four or five of them, the composition of the group varied over time, and we did programs at the universities. We did debates and fun activities to try to attract more than the very intellectual students. We would have quiz programs and contests where we would have some Indian and American students on each side posing questions that would keep it in an academic frame of reference. We had teachers and professors in the universities there, so we had people who were able to do what we weren't in a position to do and wouldn't have been appropriate for us to do. That is, sit in dorms, if you will, and the dining rooms and have long exchanges of conversation and establish themselves, one hopes, not by any dark design, but just as fellow teachers and fellow students as a believable source about American attitudes and the motivations of American policy in that part of the world.

Q: Did your work get involved at all with the Pakistan issue?

SCHAEFFER: Again I wasn't living in the cables, as the saying goes, on those issues except when I was the duty officer and that is sort of approaching the whole matter obliquely. It didn't have any mark effect except where we had let's say a professor of political science lecturing in a university. There would be questions and not infrequently it became evident quickly that the students had already some ideas themselves, a position, if you will, on the India-Pakistan border conflict. That would occur and I think it was a credit to the caliber of people that we generally attracted to the exchange program both through the Fulbright exchange, and the American Specialists Program, that by in large they were about to give a good account of themselves. That is not the same thing as saying that they were able to persuade some of the diehards. People had very deep feelings about the Pakistan claims to the territory there in Kashmir. But we had an airing of those issues often in our university programs and in our lecture activities generally, because we did do programs not just out at the universities, obviously, but at other venues, notably at USIS establishments themselves. And we were in ten cities as I mentioned earlier. We were in Hyderabad and Madras, Lucknow and Bangalore and that sort of provincial city.

Q: Could you have discussions about the American view of the Indian-Pakistan dispute or was it something that you felt was better to stay away from?

SCHAEFFER: In my memory of it we wouldn't have tackled it head on in that sort of fashion, but it was something that the speaker, especially, and very often the program chairman or MC(master of ceremonies), which was a function I found myself performing a number of times, ought to be prepared for because it was so much on the minds of these people that if you were talking about something as remote as you could imagine from the issue, some student would get up and somehow, God alone knew how, none of us did, that would remind him of this issue. So, anytime one sponsored a public meeting, or even a somewhat closed meeting like you would find at universities with mostly teachers and students, you jolly well better be prepared for that possibility.

Q: Well, you left there in 1967 so you had a good long stint there.

SCHAEFFER: I did, and as the Hindus might say, I had several incarnations while I was there. I spent two years over at the U.S. Educational Foundation as deputy director.

Q: Was that basically the Fulbright Program?

SCHAEFFER: That was the Fulbright. That was 1965-67. I found that very rewarding.

Q: How did you find the Indian candidates who were coming to you?

SCHAEFFER: I thought generally good and perhaps progressively better with passing time. I was actually in India seven years but I was there over a ten year period, so towards the close of that period I had only a dime's worth perspective. I belittle it because that is a very complex scene there and even ten years changes tend to be slow and not so dramatic. But, yes, I thought the caliber of student was improving.

We had a very good director of the Educational Foundation, Olive Reddick, who was really a person to be reckoned with in India, starting with the ambassador on down, because she had first gone there in the 1920s to teach and then she was back there during the Second World War, I think with the OWI (Office of War Information) or some such thing related to her knowledge of the country, and then finally again as director of the Educational Foundation. She had a doctorate in economics, herself. So she had very high standards academically. She also had a very strong personality so that it was not infrequent that there may be on our board there at the Foundation a vice chancellor or two, very senior professors from some of the better universities. Olive could make a very good and unforgettable case for keeping standards high in selecting participants in that program. That went for students and professors who came to the US and did either post-doctoral work or people with masters who came for a doctoral program here. I thought the caliber overall, as I remember it, was really quite good.

Q: Was there a tendency to go towards science?

SCHAEFFER: There was. Indian intellectuals, if we can begin with those who in fact are still students...there is a strong propensity for pursuing science and mathematics. Those are two fields that have attracted a lot of their best intellectual talent. It coincided with the developmental needs of the country. It is also true that in the long run I don't doubt that a number of those people ended up staying in the U.S. We know that quite a number of Indians on university faculties are in medicine, etc. But medicine, science, engineering and pure mathematics attracted a lot of their best and brightest.

Q: You left there in 1967 and then came back to Washington?

SCHAEFFER: Yes. I was at the University of Pennsylvania in Asian Studies for a year.

Q: How did you find the atmosphere? You had been pretty much involved in academic people all along so it wouldn't have been much of a bath of different type of water for you as say for a political or economic officer going to the academic world. But how did you find the academic world of Penn?

SCHAEFFER: They had a strong South Asian program. I had known a couple of the people who were there. One was Dick Lambert in sociology and one was Norman Palmer in political science. They had been out to India more than once. Palmer a number of times. Dick Lambert was in western India, I think perhaps Pune in a program that we were more or less administering from the embassy. So I did know those two people and knew of several others. It is not surprising that I knew these people because India is the jewel in the crown of South Asia.

Q: During most of the Cold War, Pakistan has been more available for help to the United States than India. Did you find any kind of a mindset on the University of Pennsylvania faculty between India and Pakistan?

SCHAEFFER: I am pressed to recall any significant attitude of that kind. There were, as you would expect, some lively discussions among the faculty and the students on the issue, especially the border issue and the whole relationship between the two countries. We did have several people there at the time with a strong interest in Pakistan, but my own memory of the South Asian program at Penn during that time was that there was a very heavy focus on India.

Q: What was the idea of the Asia studies for you?

SCHAEFFER: I have to use a variation of the old comment, Stu, and say, "I am not glad that you asked that senator." My interests had been during the Burma years Southeast Asia. And if we think the mills of the gods grind slowly, that is small stuff compared to the mills of the U.S. government when it comes to acting on all sorts of things including requests from far down in the hierarchy. I had asked if I might be considered for a Southeast Asia assignment, but that evidently went into some dark and very quiet void and didn't surface for some good while. When it did, it emerged in the form of an offer to participate in a South Asian program. By that time I had been in India for some time, so I took that opportunity.

Q: Because these definitions change from time to time, could you tell us what area is covered under South Asia and then Southeast Asia?

SCHAEFFER: Well, South Asia would be principally India, Pakistan, Ceylon and Nepal. Southeast Asia would be Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, Burma-the division was pretty much at the Bay of Bengal.

Q: So your course was South Asia?

SCHAEFFER: Yes. I went back to India after that assignment.

Q: You were in USIA for a little while weren't you?

SCHAEFFER: Yes, I was.

Q: This was 1968-69, what were you doing?

SCHAEFFER: I was in the International Cultural Service, ICS. We were backstopping the educational and cultural activities of USIA in many countries. I was working on libraries, book publishing programs and that sort of thing. They sent me out to a circuit of the area actually within a few months after I came down from Penn in the summer of 1968.

Q: Then you went off to get Hindi training?

SCHAEFFER: Yes, Hindi training after being in India all that time. It really didn't go on for very long, a few months, at FSI (Foreign Service Institute).

Q: And then off to New Delhi again. You were there from 1970-72. What were you up to then?

SCHAEFFER: I was the deputy cultural affairs officer and the cultural affairs officer was a political appointee who was an old friend of Chester Bowles and taught political science at Wesleyan. We were going strong in those years. We had very sizeable libraries in all those cities that I mentioned earlier. We had a very active exchange program. We were liaison with the Educational Foundation. We had a very substantial book publishing program. We were using some money of the USIA as well as AID to run a book program using Indian publishers and printers at the university and college level.

My main concern was really a kind of continuing involvement in educational exchange on the USIS end where the Foundation was concerned, and to some degree the book program and the field program. We had a very active program of not just having visiting American professors or occasional students that were out on study, research projects in India, but we were using people from the Mission and in those years we had a big Mission. And not just people from the Mission narrowly defined, but people from Rockefeller and Ford and any number of other projects funded by PL-480 funds.

Q: PL-480 funds were funds generated by the sale of wheat and grains to India which were deposited into a local account and grew into billions of dollars.

SCHAEFFER: That is right, it grew to be really in a sense, a kind of white elephant. This is a problem that I have never faced in my life. It was an embarrassing problem, politically. So ultimately we forgave a good part of the debt. But we also, in the years leading up to that, used that money, I thought, very well in funding a lot of these activities of bringing people out from the U.S. in the arts and education, in funding the costs of substantial, very sizeable, traveling exhibits on various facets of American life. And we had what we called at the time a multimedia program which would go on for several days in a provincial town like Lucknow or Bangalore. We would set up an exhibit in some public place in town on let's say student life in America. We would have speakers there giving talks, not just at the university, but elsewhere in the city-the Rotary Club and other venues. We would inaugurate these programs with a sort of inaugurate ceremony. I would be there speaking on behalf of the embassy and saying that I was pleased to be there with this interesting project and program. Then there would be the mayor of the town. We were often able to attract the man in charge, sometimes the vice chancellor of the university. We used that as an opportunity to call attention to some of the programs that we were doing in the country. Then we would carry on their with the exhibition opened to the public. We would have lectures and other activities of some intellectual interest. We may have a smaller more specialized exhibit across town in, let's say the science department of the college. And that program went on for several years. At the time we felt that it was a way of getting the resources that were concentrated in the four major cities of India out into what the Indians call the mofussil, the hinterland.

Q: Did you have a problem with these exchanges, this being the high Vietnam and Nixon period? There were lots of campus radicals. This was their heyday of protesting and a certain amount of lack of discipline, etc., particularly at the instructor level and maybe the associate professor level. A lot of people were feeling their oats. Did you have problems with professors coming out and students, doing this to castigate the United States?

SCHAEFFER: Now and again we might have a younger professor, and this tended to be among the younger faculty people that would come. Less often, because there were fewer who participated in these programs, some student leader who would express these views, maybe even occasionally from a platform, more often in tea shops with Indian students. But, all in all, we didn't really have a great problem there. We didn't have too deep a concern because what some of those people found out early on was that college education or even secondary at the better schools in India, was a rare and cherished privilege and many of those people who got into those schools ...maybe with some state scholarship support, maybe with some church related support...they didn't mess around. They didn't see the profit in asserting themselves in a country that had so newly found its own independence. Maybe it was a residual feeling of patriotism and gratitude for the fact that here they were free now to more nearly decide the direction their own lives would take. And I think that generally was true of many of the professors, particularly the younger ones who may have felt a little less secure in their tenure. Also the economic aspect of it was very fundamental in determining these feelings, one hesitated to play around with the job.

Q: So even if we had young academic firebrands coming out, they couldn't strike much of a spark.

SCHAEFFER: Certainly nothing like they might conceivably have in Western Europe. And, also, even with India's size and appeal to so many back here in the U.S., especially in the educational community, in real numbers there really weren't that many that were finding their way that far afield from the U.S.

Q: Kenneth Keating was our ambassador while you were there. Was he much of a figure?

SCHAEFFER: He doesn't emerge in my memory as three dimensional, or anything like the degree, of course, that Bowles did. He was there towards the end of his political career and I believe that he had lost to Bobby Kennedy. Bowles was a name well known not just by virtue of having been in India before, but also because of his roles in American politics in the years following his considerable success in business.

Q: Then you left there in 1972 and all of a sudden was yanked off to London. How did that happen?

SCHAEFFER: If I had that scenario to write myself, I would have sent myself to London first and then to India and then I would have understood better a few things, having gone more or less from the metropolitan power out to the colony. The assignment came open and, of course, the wish list was circulated regularly to the field and having been at that point all together in former British territory, I was all the more aware of the British as a colonial power and thought that it would be interesting to go back to the source of so much that I had experienced in India and Burma. If we could do a metaphor of that, it was sort of like a trek up into the hills to find the source of the river. That essentially was the appeal for me.

Q: You were there from 1972 to when?

SCHAEFFER: I was there for just two years, from 1972-74.

Q: What were you doing?

SCHAEFFER: I was in effect the deputy cultural officer and doing the usual mï¿½lange of libraries; educational exchange; going out to universities and colleges; giving, here and there, an occasional talk; and handling visitors to the UK who were brought there under embassy auspices. We had some very good people, a pretty hot cultural program at the embassy, that creation at the end of Grosvenor Square, which otherwise is rather Federal and rather nice until it got that big block house up at one end of it. We brought, now and then, some performing art groups. We had Alvin Ailey, we had Twyla Tharp, the dancers.

Q: I would have thought that a program such as you are talking about would be almost superfluous because of the normal exchanges back and forth anyway.

SCHAEFFER: Yes, that is fair enough. I quite see that, and I have to say frankly that I didn't feel that those two years were anything like as fulfilling, in part for this reason, as my time in Burma and India.

Q: It would be like preaching to the converted.

SCHAEFFER: Well, sort of. Preaching sometimes to those who know quite a lot about us, but are still skeptical. Some, I have no doubt, will remain skeptical for ever more. But we did feel constrained, as I saw it and still see it, to do our cultural thing there. I didn't really care to extend my tour, certainly not to return again for another full tour, largely for that reason.

Q: It just wasn't as foreign service and exciting as other places.

SCHAEFFER: No, it wasn't. As it has turned out in my own service abroad, every country that I have served in with the exception of Japan, and that was a unique experience, was a former British colony or Britain, itself. Later I served in West Africa for a time. So that was the least challenging of my assignments.

Q: So you left there after two years in 1974 and went to Japan?

SCHAEFFER: No. I left London in 1974 and came back to the Information Center Service again for three years. I did quite a lot in servicing the requests of posts for the kind of people that we had been getting when I was in East Asia and South Asia. So I traveled a fair amount to American universities- Harvard, Columbia, UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles), University of Chicago, and quite a spectrum of universities-talking about our overseas exchange programs and some of the other things we were doing. Sort of, not by any serious sense, a kind of liaison with American universities, but I had worked a lot with Americans coming out under the aegis of the Fulbright Program, but later we created something called the American Specialists Program and we brought quite a number of people out, outside the Fulbright Program. That got to be in the 70's certainly and even as early as the mid-60's, a pretty substantial activity in a worldwide sense. I was doing largely that kind of thing.

Q: Was it about 1975 that you went to Tokyo?

SCHAEFFER: No, I went in 1977.

Q: And how long were you in Tokyo?

SCHAEFFER: I was there nearly four years, six weeks shy of four years. And I traveled all of East Asia in this same sort of context. The posts in East Asia were not plugged into the sources of American academic and artistic talent in the sense certainly they were Europe, and countries like India. Many of them were small countries-Malaya, Hong Kong, Taiwan-and the effort was to create a regional program office that was in close communication with the resources that Washington was making available in an effort to bring the East Asian USIS posts more into the picture. They had their problems because they didn't have that many people coming into the area on assignments of one kind or another. This added to their program resources in that sense. So it involved a lot of that and some effort to try to tap some of the resources that came into Japan and work through American chambers of commerce in places like Singapore, Hong Kong, Tokyo, etc. to see to what extent resident American talent in East Asia could be made available, or short term people who were there on say a year to two teaching assignment in Hong Kong, or wherever it may be.

Q: How receptive did you find the East Asian countries to this type of program?

SCHAEFFER: I think they were generally pretty receptive. Well, there is a great variety there between countries like Korea, say, and Thailand, which one found considerably more intellectually alive than... I am almost hesitant to mention other countries, but there were several there like, perhaps Indonesia, where there was not that much. The atmosphere was not such that you could...We were able to do some of that sort of thing.

Q: But still, some ground was more fertile than others.

SCHAEFFER: Some ground was unmistakably more fertile than others.

Q: Now was China being unto itself?

SCHAEFFER: Yes, China was not in the picture.

Q: How about the Philippines?

SCHAEFFER: The Philippines was.

Q: We are talking about their big revolution when they got rid of Marcos during this period. Did this have any effect on you?

SCHAEFFER: No, it didn't really, and I think the posts were still able to do pretty much their normal programming, despite the political situation. I don't think the U.S. experienced the onus of that in the kinds of things that USIS does. Now, the political people might have had a different story to tell about that period. Perhaps we were seen as what we were doing was pretty much in the open and pretty innocuous. We weren't dealing in military programs or underwriting military assistance, etc. I think the USIS over the years, I hope, I don't doubt that it has and certainly in Burma I recall, that there was some occasional show of skepticism and suspicion as to whether or not we were just a kind of cover for CIA people or that we were in even to some extent among the more extreme views from time to time hand in glove with the CIA operatives and trying to be supportive of certain objectives they may have. My overall impression has been that USIS was not viewed with that much suspicion and alarm unless political relationships at the time between the U.S. and that country were such as to aggravate them negatively, and then pretty much anyone or any unit that was part of the American country felt the effect of that.

Q: You mentioned the Philippines. How did you find the Philippines? Did you feel that here was a place that was going down as far as the cultural interests and ties to the United States were concerned?

SCHAEFFER: I think the business people probably, and I would have to be very forthright to even respond to a question like that Stu, but I think the business people were probably taking a more positive attitude towards U.S.-Philippines relations than the people in politics, and for all I know the military. The people who were in business had an old and deep working relationship with their American sources and counterparts. They tended, as was true in almost all of these countries, to move out back and forth much more. So in that context, in that sense, they may as a group have been somewhat more sophisticated than many of the home politicians. Very often I would think it was the politicians from the provinces that tended to be somewhat more skeptical, maybe borne out of the provincial's general suspicion even of his own people at the capital. So, if you are looking beyond New Delhi or Manila, or whatever, at those people from over there some place that we see a few of our folks who go into the capital for whatever reasons, see them driving around in big shiny cars and showing up at the better eating places and functions, etc., and being photographed now and again by magazines and newspapers standing near Nehru and chatting amicably.

Q: So after this regional thing you moved off into a whole new area, didn't you?

SCHAEFFER: Yes, I did.

Q: How did that come about?

SCHAEFFER: If you will allow me to revert to my Indian self, I think Sahib did it, it was my karma.

Q: Well, you were in Tokyo for what period?

SCHAEFFER: I was in Tokyo from 1977-81.

Q: You left there in 1981 and went where?

SCHAEFFER: I went to Lagos.

Q: And you were in Lagos from 1981 to when?

SCHAEFFER: I was in Lagos not long, less than 18 months.

Q: What were you doing there?

SCHAEFFER: I was cultural officer at the embassy. I decided that Nigeria was a pretty difficult proposition for my wife. The things that one would hope should be beginning to happen economically and in consequence politically, aren't. These people have got a phenomenal resource here in oil with a tremendous market for it. And with that kind of infusion of wealth, having come from places like Burma and India, they are squandering it. Alas, so it was and so it is. The sadder part is to still be saying "so it is" today. So I felt after plugging away at that for a while...we had a wonderful ambassador...

Q: Who?

SCHAEFFER: Tom Pickering. I was proud really to be part of his staff, if you will. But, I am afraid that wasn't compensation enough of being in a country that I thought was losing the game inexcusably. They had not the association with the British, that Westernized background, that the Indians had, but then they didn't have this vast fragmented country that the Indians had with 300 or so principalities before the British became the paramount ruler. So I was glad to leave.

Q: I take it we didn't really have much in the way of effective programs from USIS?

SCHAEFFER: No. One likes to remember even in the quiet of one's own room where at last we can be as completely honest with ourselves as we will ever be, one likes to remember that we gave it a good try. Those of us who were there seemed to feel at least we were out doing the sort of programming and trying to be useful to other Americans that were coming there, in education, of course, for us there in the USIS cultural section. And we had a Fulbright Program. We had some occasional American come in on short term research or teaching assignments and we would try to open the way for them to make their presence felt beyond the institution they had been assigned to. But, I couldn't see, and I began to suspect that the light that any more optimistic person thought he or she saw at the end of the tunnel was in fact the light over the tunnel just beyond the one we were trying to get out of.

Q: I had a colleague who does oral history with me who is a retired Foreign Service officer. He got a Ph.D. in history and then a Fulbright for a year in a Nigerian university. He said it was abysmal. Nobody came to class, classes were often called for vacations or strikes, nothing got done.

SCHAEFFER: No, it didn't. They had inherited the kind of governmental and educational structure of sorts...bare in mind the British were not there very long not being a factor there until around the 1890s when they actually took the country...but they let even that bequest, or whatever one calls it, wither away from neglect and from a lack of a real feeling for it, an understanding of what it could come to with the kind of resources they had and directions that could be given with a dime's worth of cooperation and effort. So, I left and came back here and was on the Tri-Centennial Commission for a couple of years.

Q: What was the Tri-Centennial Commission?

SCHAEFFER: It was celebrating three hundred years of German settlement in America. Sixty percent of Americans are of some sort of German origin we were saying to ourselves and to anybody else who would listen. I really misread that badly, I have to confess, from the vantage point of years after. I thought there was going to be a response to that within our own society here, and I am not affected by the fact that my own great grandfather came from Baden Godenburg at all. It was not that big a factor because my father died young and I was brought up mostly with my mother's people who were mainly of British heritage. And, out of the South is a special case here in this country, so origins, roots and that sort of thing even in my time one was somewhat aware of it. Of course, I left there long years ago. But I thought more was going to come of that. It was a Presidential Commission. I must have dozed off there momentarily. If I had thought twice about it I would have realized that God alone knows how many Presidential Commissions there have been in this country in the 20th century.

Q: I think another thing is...I have strong German background myself, my mother was Lackner and we came from the forty-eighters, Carl Schurz was my great uncle, etc.

SCHAEFFER: There were you when we needed you, Stu?

Q: The thing is nobody gets up, and maybe it has to do with two world wars against Germany, but nobody gets up and beats the drum about being German.

SCHAEFFER: Well, during those two years I did discover that there are places in Pennsylvania and the upper mid-west and where German concentration tends to be, still groups that get together and wear short britches and dirndls and drink from mugs. But that is what makes this an interesting country.

Q: Well, Gene, I think we ought to cut it off there because we have the parking problem.

SCHAEFFER: Yes, we have and I think I have now gone ten or fifteen minutes passed.

Q: Okay, we will quit for this time. Thank you very much.

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Today is October 20, 1994. Gene, we missed out on Ghana. Was Ghana your last assignment?

SCHAEFFER: Yes, it was my very last.

Q: What were the dates?

SCHAEFFER: I went there in December 1984 and returned to the U.S. in June 1986, eighteen months.

Q: How did your assignment to Ghana come about and what were you doing?

SCHAEFFER: I was still on the staff of the German-American Tri-Centennial Commission, more or less doing some of the PR (public relations) aspects of that program and I wanted to do another overseas assignment, ideally in former English-speaking territories because that is where all my experience lay with the exception of those four years in Japan that we talked about. Ghana came up and having served in Nigeria, almost but not literally next door on the West Coast of Africa, and because of the old association historically with England, a very old one indeed, I thought it fit well into the pattern of my assignments. And, so, in fact, it did as I found out in the eighteen months that I spent there.

Q: What were you doing in Ghana?

SCHAEFFER: I was the cultural attachï¿½ at the embassy. The sorts of things that I was doing were pretty much typical for a cultural attachï¿½ job or assignment. I was working with exchange of persons. I was working very closely with the universities, especially the University of Ghana in Accra, the capital, and to some lesser degree with the universities at Kumasi and Cape Coast. I was also responsible for handling various exchange programs between the United States and Ghana, most of them funded variously by the U.S. and other private sources. This involved the exchange of people in specialized fields, whatever it might be, in the arts, business, various cultural and quasi cultural activities. I was administering the exchange of persons program right across the board. That is working on Fulbright activities and the other components of the Educational Exchange Program.

Q: What was the political situation like during the period you were in Ghana?

SCHAEFFER: I found it really on the whole quite stable in terms of conducting embassy business. Jerry Rawlings had come back as head of state but he was not yet president. He became president subsequently, but he had taken over the government finally in 1979. Actually Rawlings took over in 1979 from a succession of several generals who were not up to the business of bringing Ghana out of the aftermath of Kwame Nkrumah. He did not assume any official office, but rather encouraged the notion of some democratic form of government which resulted in the election of a president. This gentleman, Dr. Hilla Limann, lasted for I am afraid a very short time. The problems of the economy and of their trade with European and other countries, their principal trading partners being Germany, United States, Great Britain, Canada in a wide range of products from Ghana. Jerry was the behind the scenes eminence calling the shots and effectively ruling the country. But it was only in 1979 that he became disenchanted...

Q: The dates you were there were?

SCHAEFFER: It was not until 1984 that I went there, but I am looking at the immediately preceding period. By 1982 Jerry had taken over again because the democratic experiment of the late seventies and the start of the eighties with the presidential form of government had simply not changed Ghana's internal situation politically and economically at all. As a matter of fact it has generally deteriorated. So he took over in 1982 and continues as the president of the country after twelve years.

Q: Was the problem corruption, ineptitude or all of the above?

SCHAEFFER: The problem was in a large degree corruption and inexperience in nation building. The military succession of several generals that headed the state had no real experience of this sort, in civil administration and in rebuilding the economy of a country with actually rather good economic possibilities. It had been a favored colony in Africa of the British. It was a source of minerals, bauxite, gold and was productive agriculturally, notably in cocoa, a prime source of cocoa on the world market for a number of years. But all these resources had really been pretty much dissipated by corruption and mismanagement and lack of real ability and background to restore the country to the status it had economically under the British. They had been under the British for 130 or so years.

Q: At that time, what were American interests in Ghana?

SCHAEFFER: The United States is today certainly and has been now for some years, an important trading partner with Ghana in terms of agricultural and mineral exports. I think Ghana may just conceivably have stood rather low in priority on the American agenda in Africa. But in that I could be mistaken, of course, because Ghana is a country with a rich heritage and a significant source of gold, although not in the league with the United States or South Africa or Russia or Australia. However, in Africa it stands after South Africa in gold resources. Of course, South Africa, as we all know is a prime source of this very valuable commodity metal, on the world market. Ghana also is a prime agricultural source in terms of mainly cocoa but also casaba and plantains and one might say from the American perspective these are agricultural resources that we are not that familiar with, but a great deal of the world is familiar with them. So they did have a value in export terms. In other words it has had for centuries a very strong economic potential and it has got an experience of let us say by now 150 years or so, with the English-speaking world having come under the British well back in time. The British had presence there after a fashion from as early as the 17th century and, of course, became a significant factor in the fate and future of Ghana from that time on, notably around the advent of the 19th century.

Q: We obviously wanted a stable country, were we using the exchange program and visitors program, etc. to try to develop a government and a business community to do the job?

SCHAEFFER: We were and I think that underlines our objectives in virtually any country that you can think of, and we had a lot to build on as I've tried to intimate. The Ghanaians were long experienced in the kinds of institutions and democratic notions and principles of government and of the sort of modern economy as a result of those long years under British rule.

Q: You were dealing with the University of Ghana and other universities, what was your impression of them?

SCHAEFFER: It was really very favorable indeed. I don't say that to sound in the least political, but I couldn't in a sense help but compare it to some of the other countries that had an English heritage of university education, starting with my first assignment in Burma and of course India and Nigeria. But I thought they had some very capable people there, increasingly people who were receiving their advanced degrees in the United States. Some of the earlier and older faculty members had had most of their training in Britain or there thereabouts. But it was I thought a very promising institution in the country. They had a wonderful new campus dating from around the time of their independence in 1957. So they had a long standing connection educationally and culturally with the British. In other words, they had an environment, educationally and culturally, that we could work in. We could go in and do some things and say some things that we hoped would have meaning and benefit.

Q: I have interviewed some people who have served in Nigeria and were very depressed with what was happening there. Students were sort of running the place and they were on strike, etc. It just wasn't working very well. At the time you were there, how did you find the universities as far as faculty and student body and how was it put together?

SCHAEFFER: I found it very receptive. Now, Nigeria is a much older country and has some very real divisions ethnically and culturally. We know the Muslims are there and strong in the north and the people in the south tend to be the substantial Christian element. There are animists and people from other native beliefs and religion in Nigeria. Nigeria has simply, it seems to me not been able to get its act together in terms of encouraging trust and cooperation among these very disparate groups, especially between the Muslims of the north and the Christians and others of the south.

I was somewhat fortunate I think to be there at a time when they were attempting seriously, one thought, to approach a democratic structure nationally. They had a president, Shagari, which they hadn't had one before to my knowledge, and they certainly haven't had one since. They have been run pretty much by the military.

Whereas the Ghanaians, I don't have the sense that they have been that divided ethnically. There is a very large element in Ghana, the Akans, who are well regarded and their capital is Kumasi. My feeling was that Ghanaians generally accepted the Akan status and tradition and their accomplishments of the past. They were a fairly significant military force...the British had a difficult time overcoming them in their effort to take over that part of West Africa.

But, all in all, I think the differences between the two countries...of course, Ghana is a much smaller country, but smallness doesn't necessarily go proportionately with manageability. Ghana is slightly less smaller in size than the state of Oregon. Right now I believe the population stands somewhere in the range of 16-17 million people. So, if you start to think of that in U.S. terms that would be a huge population for a state like Oregon. But, I think we can't do that because their whole background is so very different and the demands on the economy of 16-17 million people are not remotely what they are in the United States, if we take up a very populous state as an example, like New York perhaps.

Q: How did you work with the universities for example?

SCHAEFFER: It went swimmingly and I don't ascribe any of that to anything that I brought to the job. It was a very receptive atmosphere. I felt that we spoke the same language in more ways than the literal sense, that there was a certain rapport and understanding that pre-existed during my time as cultural attachï¿½ there. So I found that one of the more charming aspects of my job. I have to say I wasn't that fully aware of what I might encounter when I went there, apart from doing some reading as one generally does and talking to people who had served there. But, I thought on the average they were fairly sophisticated people, the faculty and administration. I felt the students were very open to our activities, and we tended to get a good response to programs that I thought of interest to them. So, one always felt at home in entering the campus, I can recall that quite clearly. And that was a very satisfying aspect of my time in Ghana because they were one of my principal clients.

Q: Did you feel that someone going through the University of Ghana got a good education?

SCHAEFFER: I felt they got a tolerably good education, but I would be cautious in saying that. Now, the University of Ghana's forte was in the social sciences and humanities. The University of Kumasi had originally been a technical school and that was their emphasis. The University of Cape Coast was somewhere between, although more likely on the side of the social sciences and humanities. Their physical facilities were quite good. It was a handsome campus, well laid out in the period just before independence in the fifties. And increasingly, it seemed to me, faculty members had had some U.S. experience. Not necessarily an advanced degree, but here on study assignments or research, etc. Their backgrounds tended still to be more strongly British oriented. And the British Council, our colleagues there, were understandably quite active in the country in a variety of ways that we felt complemented our own efforts.

Q: Was there a sense of competition with the British Council?

SCHAEFFER: I didn't feel it. Although, had there been, my experience with British colleagues in these countries I have served in and in England, itself, is that they don't tend to present you with any sense of competition. It is extremely rare that you get that feeling in their presence. Working together with them in a sense of working in the same vineyard, as it were.

Q: Who was ambassador when you were there?

SCHAEFFER: Robert Fritts. I thought that he provided commendable leadership for the work of the embassy in Ghana. He was very accessible. He showed a personal interest in what we were doing. We always had access to Ambassador Fritts and that, of course, goes without saying a very real plus in any aspect of embassy work...to feel that you have the understanding, interest and support of the man at the top in the embassy.

Q: Here you had Jerry Rawlings running the country. It had tried democracy a couple of times and it ended up not working very well and the army taking over. Was there any effort on our mission from the USIA side to develop democratic instruments, ways of thinking, etc.?

SCHAEFFER: Well, in a country with Ghana's relatively brief but intensive experience in finding itself after Nkrumah that would have been extremely tricky. But I will say to their great credit, that we had very substantial freedom in the kinds of programming we did and the kinds of activities that we organized. I never had any sense that there was anyone looking over our shoulder from the Ghanaian government. Now, it may be because of the nature of the work that I was doing, working in the field of education and broadly defined culture. It may be an unoriginal comparison to make, but it is somewhat like being on the side of God, flag and motherhood.

Q: What about exchange programs? Was there a lot of pressure from elements of government or the business community to make sure that their children got into these programs?

SCHAEFFER: No, again I didn't find that in my time there, keeping in mind that I was there for eighteen months. Most of the exchanges that we did tended to be at the research and professorial level, so we were getting more mature people who clearly had to have some fairly definite and persuasive credentials for participating in the program. And then we were also facilitating exchanges between various professional groups in the United States and Ghana...administrators, educational or otherwise, and others of that ilk. So in short, that is a long way of saying that we were dealing for the most part with mature individuals. We did send a few people in the arts. I remember a poet who I think had a very successful experience at the Iowa Writers Workshop.

Q: What about in the cultural field? How did American culture, the people who came out, mesh with the Ghanaians? Did they like those we sent, and what were the things American that they found particularly interesting?

SCHAEFFER: Bear in mind that I am dealing mainly with college and university people, not below that educational level with virtually no exceptions. So their tastes and interests were at least relatively catholic. We had people coming in and talking about trade union matters. We had people talking about various aspects of the American political establishment and the political organization one finds in a country like that, historically and currently. We had people talking about the arts. We had actors come from the Oregon Shakespeare Festival and do performances over the period of a week that were well received and well attended. We had a few musicians and a scattering of others. So, I felt because we were in a country with an old background in English and concomitantly background of experience with the English, themselves, and the British Council...because the British Council and USIS did a lot of the same sort of planning as one might reasonably expect...we had good audiences who didn't have to really be tutored or informed, let alone instructed, in sort of the American atmosphere in the arts, and in a lesser sense education because that is a more complicated scene. But there is enough familiarity on the part of any people who have a substantial tradition in the British scheme and notions and approach to education, that they can transfer that background to an understanding of our educational system here and our educational theories and practices. So the leap between the two is not that strenuous or great.

Q: So you left there with a pretty good feeling?

SCHAEFFER: I left there with a very good feeling. It was one of these nice things that with luck can now and again happen to us in life. It was so much better than I expected. I was hopeful when I went there, but I must confess that I had really rather small knowledge of the reality of that scene.

Q: One last question on Ghana. By this point did the Cold War intrude at all or was this pretty well over as far as competition with the Soviet Union?

SCHAEFFER: I didn't see members of the Soviet mission in Ghana as anything like a subject for concern on our part as I did in Nigeria. I was considerably more aware of them in Nigeria because they were active there. They were active in education, and quite active in book publishing and related fields. Perhaps this was because of the difference in size of the countries or maybe because of the difference in the estimates that the Soviets had in the meaning for them, politically and otherwise, as between Nigeria and Ghana. But I just found that Ghana was a country that was one of those charming experiences where one realized early on that one did have a lot to learn and be surprised by because it was not without here and there some limitations and some disappointments largely in respect to our work and only very incidentally in personal terms.

Q: Well, you retired then in 1986?

SCHAEFFER: I retired in 1986 from Ghana.

Q: And then, just very briefly, what did you retire to or did you just retire to retire?

SCHAEFFER: No, I have retired to local politics. Not running for any office but working very closely with people who are. I am also working in the theater and have acted in the little theater in Alexandria occasionally. Then, much more recently, as a member of the Library Board in Fairfax County.

Q: Extremely controversial...

SCHAEFFER: Extremely controversial. I have to tell you, Stu, that I have said to several friends that when our district supervisor, Mt. Vernon District Supervisor Jerry Highland, who is really an awfully good guy and very committed and very well equipped in all ways that I can see for the work that he is doing in his second term at least in that job...when he asked me if I would like to replace a person who had been ten years on the board and was quite effective and quite good, I felt as if I were perhaps being invited to join the church choir. What I found out quickly enough after going into it was that I was actually being asked to take part in the shoot-out in the OK Corral, and so it has been.

Q: It is in the papers on almost a daily basis. It is basically the conservatives versus the liberals.

SCHAEFFER: The conservatives versus the liberals with regard to things that are in the collections at our libraries, and I have to say that I have come to feel like the man who said just before they hung him, "this will certainly be a lesson to me."

Q: Well, why don't we stop at that point? Thank you very much.

End of interview